

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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R 102000Z DEC 74

FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5053

INFO AMEMBASSY ASUNCION

AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

AMEMBASSY LIMA

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 8089

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, BL

SUBJ: POPULAR REACTION AFTER ONE MONTH OF THE "NEW ORDER"

1. SUMMARY: THE BANZER GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN PLEASANTLY SURPRISED BY THE GENERALLY FAVORABLE POPULAR REACTION TO ITS "NEW ORDER" REFORM PROGRAM OVER THE MONTH SINCE THE PROGRAM WAS ANNOUNCED ON NOVEMBER 9. INITIALLY NEGATIVE REACTIONS TO THE PROGRAM FROM ELEMENTS OF LABOR, THE CHURCH AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS WERE LIMITED AND EASILY CONTROLLED. IN ADDITION, THE GOB HAS COMBINED AN EFFECTIVE PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN WITH A FEW HIGHLY-PUBLICIZED REFORM MEASURES TO GAIN A TEMPORARY MEASURE OF SYMPATHY FOR ITS PROGRAM FROM BROAD SECTORS OF THE POPULACE. THE GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE TO PROCEED WITH CONSIDERABLE SKILL AND CAUTION, HOWEVER, IF IT IS NOT TO FACE RENEWED OPPOSITION ACTIVITIES FROM LABOR UNIONS AND

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UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN THE EARLY MONTHS OF 1975. END SUMMARY.

2. IN EARLY NOVEMBER 1974 THE GOB TOOK VARIOUS PREVENTIVE MEASURES, INCLUDING THE DECLARATION OF A STATE-OF-SIEGE AND THE PLACING OF THE ARMED FORCES ON ALERT, IN ORDER TO CONTROL ANY DISTURBANCES WHICH MIGHT RESULT FROM THE ABORTIVE COUP ATTEMPT IN SANTA CRUZ AND THE SUBSEQUENT ANNOUNCEMENT OF A "NEW ORDER" IN BOLIVIAN NATIONAL LIFE. SUBSEQUENTLY, KEY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, INCLUDING PRESIDENT BANZER HIMSELF, HAVE EXPRESSED THEIR SURPRISE AND PLEASURE AT THE GENERALLY FAVORABLE POPULAR REACTION TO THE "NEW ORDER" REFORM PROGRAM. ONE MONTH AFTER THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF ITS REFORM MEASURES, THE GOB FACES A SITUATION IN WHICH A MAJORITY OF INFORMED PUBLIC OPINION APPEARS WILLING TO PERMIT THE GOVERNMENT TO DEMONSTRATE WHAT IT CAN DO TO TRANSFORM THE PUBLIC LIFE OF THE COUNTRY.

3. SUCH NEGATIVE REACTION AS DID OCCUR IN EARLY NOVEMBER WAS LIMITED, PREDICTABLY, TO LABOR AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, AND WAS EASILY CONTROLLED. FORTY-EIGHT HOUR STRIKES WERE BEGUN IN THE MINES AND AMONG FACTORY WORKERS IN COCHABAMBA ON NOVEMBER 12, WHILE THE UNIVERSITIES OF LA PAZ AND COCHABAMBA WERE CLOSED ON NOVEMBER 13 TO PREVENT EXPECTED STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS. IN QUICK SUCCESSION, HOWEVER, BOTH THE FACTORY AND MINERWORKER STRIKES SUBSIDED, WHILE CONDITIONS IN THE LEADING NATIONAL UNIVERSITIES RETURNED TO NORMAL IN TIME TO PERMIT THEIR RE-OPENING IN LA PAZ AND COCHABAMBA ON NOVEMBER 18 AND 21, RESPECTIVELY. EVEN THE ARREST OF THREE LEADING MINERS FEDERATION LEADERS ON NOVEMBER 15 FAILED TO PROVOKE EXPRESSIONS OF RESISTANCE FROM THE VOLATILE AND HIGHLY-POLITICIZED MINERWORKERS.

4. SUBSEQUENTLY, LEADERS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN BOLIVIA ALSO RAISED OBJECTIONS TO THE PHILOSOPHICAL ORIENTATION OF THE "NEW ORDER", IN ITS SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ASPECTS. ON NOVEMBER 16, THREE BISHOPS OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF LA PAZ VOICED CONCERN THAT THE REFORM PROGRAM SHOULD NOT BE IMPOSED BY FORCE OR PRESSURE, IN A MANNER WHICH WOULD UNDERMINE THE RIGHT OF FREE ASSOCIATION, THE RIGHT TO ORGANIZE LABOR UNIONS OR THE EXISTENCE OF A FREE PRESS. FOLLOWING A CONFERENCE OF BOLIVIAN BISHOPS IN LA PAZ, CARDINAL MAURER

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ISSUED A PUBLIC APPEAL DECEMBER 2 FOR A "BROAD POLITICAL AMNESTY", AND FOLLOWED UP BY MEETING WITH PRESIDENT BANZER ON DECEMBER 3 TO DISCUSS THE BISHOPS' CONCERNS. AT THIS MEETING, BANZER APPARENTLY RE-ASSURED THE BISHOPS THAT THE GOB WOULD APPLY ITS NEW MEASURES IN WAYS WHICH DO NOT VIOLATE HUMAN RIGHTS AND MET OTHER OF THE CHURCH'S CRITICISMS OF THE GENERAL LINES OF GOB POLICY UNDER THE "NEW ORDER" SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT.

5. THE BANZER GOVERNMENT'S RELATIVE SUCCESS IN AVOIDING MAJOR CRITICISM OF ITS NEW ORIENTATION IS ALSO DUE TO THE COMBINATION OF AN EFFECTIVE OFFICIAL PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN, WIDESPREAD REPUDIATION OF THE FORMER CO-GOVERNING POLITICAL PARTIES AND A FEW WELL-PUBLICIZED REFORM MEASURES. AMONG OTHER STEPS, THE GOB TOOK CARE TO GIVE FULL PUBLICITY TO THE RESIGNATIONS OF VARIOUS RELATIVES OF PRESIDENT BANZER, TO INITIATE A FULL-SCALE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE CONTRABAND TRADE, AND TO ANNOUNCE THAT MILITARY OFFICERS SERVING IN OFFICIAL POSTS WILL COLLECT ONLY THEIR NORMAL MILITARY SALARIES. TO DEFUSE POTENTIAL NEGATIVE REACTIONS BY KEY OPINION LEADERS, THE GOVERNMENT IMMEDIATELY INVITED PROMINENT PROFESSIONALS, BUSINESSMEN AND NEWSPAPER EDITORS TO OCCUPY OFFICIAL POSTS, EITHER AS ADMINISTRATORS OR "ADVISORS", WITHIN THE GOB STRUCTURE. IN ADDITION, THE GOVERNMENT QUICKLY RE-APPOINTED A NUMBER OF CAMPESINO, BUSINESS AND LABOR LEADERS TO THEIR FORMER ELECTIVE OFFICES AS OFFICIAL "COORDINATORS" OF THEIR RESPECTIVE FUNCTIONAL AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY.

6. FOR THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE, THE LACK OF ORGANIZED OPPOSITION ACTIVITY SHOULD ASSURE CONTINUED SOCIAL PEACE AND FAVORABLE DOMESTIC CLIMATE FOR GOB INITIATIVES THROUGH EARLY JANUARY. IN THE FIRST THREE MONTHS OF 1975, HOWEVER, THE GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE TO PROCEED WITH CONSIDERABLE SKILL AND CAUTION IN THE FACE OF A PROBABLE RENEWAL OF OPPOSITION ACTIVITY BY LABOR UNIONS AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS. LESS ACTIVITY IS EXPECTED FROM THE POLITICAL PARTIES, BOTH THOSE OF THE OPPOSITION AND THE FORMER CO-GOVERNING MNR AND FSB, NONE OF WHICH APPEARS TO HAVE CONCRETE PLANS FOR ANTI-GOVERNMENT ACTIVITY IN THE NEAR-TERM FUTURE. THE GREATEST THREAT TO THE GOB IN EARLY 1975 IS MORE LIKELY TO ARISE

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FROM EFFORTS BY DISCONTENTED YOUNGER AND MIDDLE GRADE MILITARY OFFICERS TO EXPLOIT SITUATIONS OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL UNREST, POSSIBLY COMBINED WITH A DOWNTURN IN THE ECONOMY OR OTHER UNFAVORABLE DEVELOPMENTS FOR THE GOVERNMENT'S AMBITIOUS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM.

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